



Appeal to Review for Educational Oversight

Severn Business College, April 2013

Introduction

Severn Business College (the College) underwent a Review for Educational Oversight in November 2012. The Review resulted in the following judgements:

- **No confidence** in the College's management of academic standards for which it is responsible
- **Limited confidence** in the College's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities
- **Reliance can** be placed on the accuracy and/or completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

The College was advised that it could appeal the judgements of no confidence and limited confidence.

Under QAA's appeals procedure, an appeal can be made against a review team's judgement on the following grounds:

- Procedure: That the review team failed to carry out agreed procedures, or exceeded its powers, in such a way that the legitimacy of the decisions reached are called into question
- Perversity: That the review team's conclusions were unreasonable or disproportionate in the light of the available evidence. This may be because irrelevant matters were taken into account or relevant matters were not taken into account
- New material: There is material that was in existence at the time the review team made its decision which, had it been made available before the review had been completed, would have influenced the judgements of the team and in relation to which, there is good reason for it not having been provided to the review team.

The College submitted an appeal in February 2013.

Under QAA's appeals procedure, the appeal was referred to an Independent Reviewer. The Independent Reviewer may reject an appeal only where he/she decides there is no realistic prospect of the appeal being upheld. In all other cases, the Independent Reviewer will refer the appeal to an appeal panel.

The decision

The Independent Reviewer decided that the appeal should be referred to an appeal panel.

The Appeal Panel decided that the review team's judgements of **no confidence** and **limited confidence** be confirmed. As such, the College's appeal was rejected by the Appeal Panel.

Reasons for rejecting the appeal against the judgement

The Appeal Panel considered the matters raised by the College in support of its claims that the review team failed to carry out agreed procedures in such a way that the legitimacy of the decisions reached were called into question, and that the review team's conclusions were unreasonable or disproportionate in the light of the available evidence.

The Appeal Panel noted that the College had raised concerns about the experience of the review team, particularly in relation to private providers. The Panel found no evidence of inexperience in relation to the review team being qualified to make well founded judgements on the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Indeed, the Panel found the judgements and recommendations of the review team to be well considered, carefully drafted, and appropriate.

The Appeal Panel considered each individual contested recommendation detailed in the appeal, but noted that it was the overall judgements of 'no confidence' and 'limited confidence' that had to be considered under QAA's appeals process, and hence it had to consider the reasonableness of the judgements taken as a whole. As the Panel did not find that any of the contested recommendations were unreasonable in the light of the available evidence, or that the review team failed to consider evidence that it should have considered in making its judgements, the Panel was unanimous in finding no grounds for upholding the appeal.

In relation to the specific recommendations that were questioned by the College, the Appeal Panel found the following:

It is essential that the College clarifies the award and level of study that each student is registered on

The Appeal Panel could not find any evidence in the appeal and supporting documents to refute the review team's judgement that the student record system did not effectively support the management of academic standards, which was the basis of the recommendation above. As such, the Panel could not support the College's claim that the recommendation was perverse.

It is essential that the College reviews its course planning processes at strategic and operational level

The Appeal Panel noted the College's claim that the review team did not consider documentation relating to course planning, which it claims was readily available at the time of the review. The Panel noted that this documentation was not supplied in support of the appeal, and hence could not find any evidence to support the College's claim that the recommendation was perverse. The Panel took into account the fact that under QAA's review method the responsibility for evidencing the management of academic standards lies with the College, and not with the review team or the Panel.

It is essential that the College ensures that students transferred from NCFE to LCM are able to complete their award

The Appeal Panel noted again that the College stated in its appeal that evidence was available at the time and that the review team failed to access, or request access, to this. The Panel noted again that this claim was not substantiated with the provision of such evidence in the appeal, and reiterates the point made above that it is the responsibility of the College to provide relevant evidence. The Panel could find no evidence to uphold the claim of perversity.

It is essential that the College reviews and develops its policies and procedures relating to annual monitoring to ensure they are effective and operationally fit for purpose

The Appeal Panel could not reconcile the allegation of perversity with the supporting comments made in the appeal. The College acknowledges that the Annual Monitoring and Review process was in development, and that it will make concerted efforts to reflect on its experience and formalise action-based outcomes moving forward. As such, the Panel could not find any evidence to suggest that the recommendation was perverse, and felt that the College had acknowledged the importance of the recommendation in its own statements in the appeal.

It is essential that the College implements action points specified by the awarding organisations within the specified deadline

The Appeal Panel noted that the College accepted that it had not responded to recommendations in a timely manner. However, the College claimed that this should not form the basis of a 'no confidence' judgement in the area of academic standards and hence argued that the recommendation was perverse. The Panel were clear that the 'no confidence' judgement was based on the series of essential recommendations in the academic standards section of the report, and not on this recommendation alone. The Panel considered the recommendation to be reasonable.

It is essential that the College delivers appropriate and developmental examination preparation

The Appeal Panel noted the College's statement that students undertake mock examinations, but noted that the review team in their responses had acknowledged this and had clarified that this alone was not regarded as adequate examination preparation. Considering this and the evidence provided, the Panel was satisfied that the recommendation was reasonable.

It is advisable that the policy in internal verification be further developed to reflect the awarding organisations' requirements and promote transparency

The Appeal Panel noted that the recommendation was to **further** develop the policy on internal verification suggesting that the review team had considered the evidence available. Given that no further relevant evidence was submitted with the appeal to suggest that the recommendation was perverse, the Panel could not uphold the claim of the College.

It is advisable that the College develops comprehensive course handbooks to detail how all the course units are to be delivered and assessed and the award achieved

The Appeal Panel noted that the College claimed that there were a number of key documents in existence at the time of the review visit, and the College submitted as part of the appeal documentation examples of course handbooks. The Panel noted that these had not been customised for the College, but were technical specifications. As one reviewer commented in response to the appeal, the handbook did not tell students about the unit order, the resources the College offers, teaching, learning and assessment, or the overall delivery plan. In the light of this, the Panel found the recommendation to be reasonable.